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FACT SHEET

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Judicial Council of California

The 28-member Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts serves as the council's staff agency.

History

On November 2, 1926, the California voters approved a constitutional amendment establishing the Judicial Council as the policymaker for the third coequal branch of state government and granted the new body responsibility for overseeing the state-wide administration of justice. This amendment marked the advent of professional court management in California and has played a crucial role in maintaining the strength and independence of the judiciary.

Mandated Responsibilities

The Judicial Council is required by legislative mandate to:

- Establish direction and set priorities for the continual improvement of the court system;
- Promulgate rules of court administration, practice, and procedure;
- Sponsor and take positions on legislation that affects the California judicial system;
- Approve budgets for the California judicial branch;
- Approve reports to the Legislature; and
- Respond to appropriate mandates from the Legislature.

Major Reforms

The current stage in the council's history is marked by a focus on productivity, accountability, and innovation. Beginning in the late 1980s, the council has undergone a series of fundamental reorganizations aimed at incorporating more input not

only from within the judicial branch but from other interested entities and individuals. This broad participation assists the council in effectively meeting postmodern needs. Council-initiated reforms have affected every area of court operations, from jury service and court interpreters to court technology and assistance for self-represented litigants and troubled families. At the same time, the council has promoted unity and cooperation both within the judicial branch and between it and its sister branches.

Three laudable and long-sought reforms have allowed the judicial branch to successfully address ongoing court management challenges in this new millennium.

Trial Court Funding Act of 1997

Effective January 1, 1998, the Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 provided courts with their first stable, secure, and highly accountable statewide funding system. No other reform in California court history has done more to free courts from day-to-day financial uncertainty or has been more important in allowing the courts to focus their resources and attention on improving access and service to the public.

Trial court unification

The unification of the municipal and superior courts, which began in 1998 and is now effective in all 58 counties, gave California a one-tier trial court system that has produced efficiencies far exceeding early expectations.

Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002

The transfer of ownership and management of all trial court facilities from individual counties to the state is designed to improve the condition of California's court facilities. These transfers will enable the Judicial Council to ensure that justice is administered effectively and accessibly throughout the state. The first of 450 expected property transfers took place in Riverside County in 2004 when responsibility for the Larson Justice Center was transferred to the State of California. The first transfer of title to a court facility took effect on January 3, 2006, when ownership of the Lodi Department 2 facility in San Joaquin County transferred to the State of California.

Other Highlights

Reforming the jury system

By January 2000, all the trial courts had adopted a one-day or one-trial jury system. The council is working to improve statewide jury operations and to approve jury instructions that accurately state the law and are understandable to jurors.

Increasing access and fairness in state courts

The council has developed numerous education and outreach programs to improve access and fairness for all persons using the court system, including those with disabilities. In 2001, the council launched the California Courts Online Self-Help Center to improve court access for litigants without attorneys.

Expanding court interpreter services

The council is expanding a comprehensive court interpreter program that will increase the number of interpreters and improve the quality of interpreting services.

Helping children and families

Many far-reaching efforts are under way to expedite court processes, services, and support for the growing number of families in crisis.

Improving court technology

The council adopted the first-ever statewide *Tactical Plan for Court Technology* to coordinate technology funding, procurement, and resource management in the trial courts.

Reaching out to communities

Because of the council's efforts, all 58 counties have developed individual community-focused strategic plans for local budgeting, resource allocation, and project prioritization consistent with Judicial Council Strategic Plan goals.

Strategic Planning

The Judicial Council's Long-Range Strategic Plan for the California judicial system, *Leading Justice Into the Future*, contains a detailed action plan for the council's advisory committees and its staff agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts. The plan sets forth the council's vision of a judicial system that is responsible for managing the fair administration of justice across the state while encouraging local management and discretion in court operations. The Judicial Council's six goals are to improve:

1. Access, fairness, and diversity;
2. Independence and accountability;
3. Modernization of management and administration;
4. Quality of justice and service to the public;
5. Education; and
6. Technology.

Selection of Members

Members of the council and its committees are selected by a nominating procedure intended to attract applicants from across the legal system and to result in a membership that is diverse in experience, gender, background, and geography.

The 21 voting members of the Judicial Council consist of the Chief Justice, 14 judges appointed by the Chief Justice, 4 attorney members appointed by the State Bar Board of Governors, and 1 member from each house of the Legislature.

The council also has 7 advisory members who include court executives or administrators and the president of the California Judges Association. Staggered terms, with one-third of the council's membership changing each year, ensure continuity while creating opportunities for new participation and input.

Roster of the Judicial Council of California

Chair

Hon. Ronald M. George
Chief Justice of California

Hon. Dennis E. Murray
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Tehama

Supreme Court

Hon. Marvin R. Baxter
Associate Justice of the Supreme Court

Hon. William J. Murray, Jr.
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of San Joaquin

Courts of Appeal

Hon. Candace D. Cooper
*Presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal
Second Appellate District, Division Eight*

Hon. Michael Nash
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

Hon. Richard D. Huffman
*Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal
Fourth Appellate District, Division One*

Hon. Richard E. L. Strauss
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of San Diego

Hon. Eileen C. Moore
Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Three

Hon. James Michael Welch
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of San Bernardino

Legislature

Hon. Joseph Dunn
Member of the Senate

Superior Courts

Hon. J. Stephen Czuleger
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

Hon. Dave Jones
Member of the Assembly

Hon. Michael T. Garcia
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Sacramento

State Bar

Mr. Anthony P. Capozzi
Attorney at Law

Hon. Suzanne Kingsbury
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of El Dorado

Mr. Thomas V. Girardi
Attorney at Law

Hon. Charles W. McCoy, Jr.
Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles

Mr. Rex S. Heinke
Attorney at Law

Hon. Barbara J. Miller
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Alameda

Ms. Barbara J. Parker
Chief Assistant City Attorney, City of Oakland

Advisory Members

Hon. Ronald E. Albers

*Commissioner of the Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco*

Ms. Tamara Lynn Beard

*Executive Officer, Superior Court of California,
County of Fresno*

Ms. Deena Fawcett

*Clerk/Administrator of the Court of Appeal,
Third Appellate District*

Hon. Terry B. Friedman

*Judge of the Superior Court of California, County
of Los Angeles*

Mr. Alan Slater

*Chief Executive Officer, Superior Court of
California, County of Orange*

Ms. Sharol H. Strickland

*Executive Officer, Superior Court of California,
County of Butte*

Hon. Sharon J. Waters

*Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California,
County of Riverside*

Secretary

Mr. William C. Vickrey

Administrative Director of the Courts

Contact:

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Additional resources:

Publications, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/4_22jc.htm